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WelcomeBC

NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Advanced Education
Ministry of Attorney General

ESL TUTORING TO HELP NEW CANADIANS FEEL AT HOME

VICTORIA – Immigrants settling in small and remote B.C. communities will improve their English while learning about the Canadian way of life through a tutoring program announced today by Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell and Attorney General Wally Oppal.

"Volunteer tutors have helped tens of thousands of adults all across B.C. learn the literacy skills they need to reach their full potential," Coell said. "That same approach will open doors for new immigrants and refugees, as they work one-on-one to become fluent in English and get acquainted with their new homes and neighbours."

Colleges, school districts and community-based organizations serving immigrants and refugees deliver a variety of adult English as a second language classes, but some communities have too few newcomers to offer regular classes. Seven successful pilot projects, funded through the Ministry of Attorney General, used volunteer tutors last year to meet the needs of smaller, more remote communities, paving the way for this year's programs.

Up to $3 million in federal settlement funding through the Ministry of Attorney General is available over the next two years. So far this year, 23 communities are receiving $523,000 for programs featuring tutoring by trained volunteers as well as small group classes, field trips and guest speakers from community facilities and services. The programs are offered by community groups working with B.C.'s public post-secondary institutions.

"Through Welcome BC, we aim to support newcomers in becoming self-sufficient as quickly as possible," said Oppal. "The ability to communicate in one of our official languages is key to that goal. This program is a perfect example of British Columbians welcoming new immigrants by helping them learn our language and our values."

People taking part in the program set learning goals at the beginning of the year, such as passing their driver's test. With their tutors or in small groups, they practise their language skills in real-life situations, like shopping, banking, playing sports and socializing.

The new program is an expansion of the Ministry of Advanced Education's community adult literacy program, which this year provided $2.4 million to 62 projects around B.C.

"Reaching out to the immigrant community in this way will pay dividends for everyone," said Shirley Bond, Minister of Education, who is responsible for literacy in B.C. "Having a stronger command of the English language will make it much easier for newcomers to develop job skills, continue their education and contribute to, and benefit from, life in British Columbia."

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Since 2001, $9.2 million has been provided for community adult literacy programs throughout B.C., including the funding announced today for adult English as a second language programs. The Province has announced more than $124 million in new literacy programs and services in the past six years, and has launched ReadNow BC, a comprehensive action plan to improve British Columbians' literacy skills.

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Backgrounder available at http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/literacy/welcome.htm

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